

JOBS



Hey Buddy, Can You Spare A Job?

With real unemployment cresting beyond 20 percent and a budgetary meltdown that portends either a grim austerity program or bankruptcy – or both – a crowded and collapsing California foreshadows the nation’s new normal

A journalist goes down and out in the formerly Golden State in search of those “jobs Americans won’t do”

By Mark Cromer

For a moment, it seems like it might be 1981 again. I am standing in the lobby of the Carl’s Jr. on Indian Hill Boulevard in Pomona, a fast-food restaurant that has managed to survive the socioeconomic convulsions the city has long suffered that has left much of the commercial property along the boulevard in a state of perpetual semi-blight; scarred by graffiti, etched windows, litter, loitering vagrants, and the decaying storefronts of businesses that have failed and those that are just hanging on. Even a McDonalds franchise died on this boulevard.

I have dropped in not to order a Super Star burger, fries, and a shake, but rather to ask for an application to make and serve them. I’ve come looking for a job, *any job*, that this restaurant in the fourth-largest fast-food chain in the country might have open. The guy behind the register, who looks to be in his late teens or maybe early 20s, offers only the briefest of pause when I ask for an application. It’s a quickly suppressed look that tells me he’s perhaps concerned that he’s seeing more people like me of late — middle-age men and women looking for work as proverbial “burger-flippers” and other bottom-rung service industry jobs that serve as an economic lifeboat (or, more accurately, driftwood) until the rescue ship comes along to save them.

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But he handed me the application with a polite smile and told me the manager would be around most of the week so I could drop it back by pretty much any time during the day. “I don’t know if we’re hiring,” he said, adding almost as an afterthought “But you can try.”

Millions of out of work Americans are confronted with chronic joblessness even as millions more foreign workers are still employed.

Of course, he couldn’t have guessed that I wasn’t really looking for this kind of work, not yet anyway. He didn’t know that I wasn’t yet fighting this desperately for my financial survival, but that I was actually a writer interested in exploring the whimsical adage that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and their dance partner on the ethnocentric Left have spun together into a convenient “conventional wisdom” that is routinely played in high-rotation by a mostly unquestioning media: *These are jobs Americans don’t want and won’t do*. It is this gospel that

the advocates for open borders sing loudly against any suggestion that mass immigration into the United States be dramatically reduced to allow American workers and their communities some breathing room; and it is a chorus that grows only louder in the face of virtually any effort to secure the border and prevent illegal workers from taking jobs away from citizens. The corporatist suits of the chamber and the racialists of the ethnic-identity wing of the Left surely sing it for different reasons, but it’s a song they routinely harmonize together on from Fox News to MSNBC.

As the second year of the Great Recession came to a close, I thought I might run that claim through a basic field test by revisiting some of the blue collar, entry-level jobs I had worked during my youth, positions that I had plenty of experience in, to get a better understanding of what actually happens when an American citizen does indeed want such work and is actively looking for it. So I again went looking for jobs as a fast-food cook, a delivery driver, a thrift-store pick-up driver, a busboy, a dishwasher, and more. And I branched out a little as well, looking for work in the ubiquitous carwashes of Southern California.

It didn’t take long to discover what millions of Americans are going through on a daily basis; struggling to make it through a job-search that is now far more crowded, chaotic, and desperate than any pie chart or government statistic will ever accurately reflect. And while many journalists are loathe to acknowledge it, the fact is that millions of out-of-work Americans are confronted with chronic joblessness even as millions more foreign workers — many of whom are in the country and on the job illegally — are still employed. While perpetually having far more workers than available jobs is the nirvana of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and its allies at the *Wall Street Journal*, it’s a dangerous dynamic that breeds a volatile climate of resentment—a potentially explosive stasis in a country that allows approximately one million foreign workers to enter legally each year and nearly as many illegally, even as its own countrymen struggle to find bottom-rung ‘survival jobs.’

But it was not always this way.

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Thirty years earlier, I had stepped into the same Carl’s Jr. as a teenager looking for a job that might help out a little at home — which at the time was a small apartment about a mile away. Back then, my mom was a single woman that had raised her two boys sans child-support on a public school teacher’s salary, which in the 1970s and early ‘80s offered pretty much a no-frills flight: enough money to keep a roof overhead, the lights on, food on the table, and shoes on our feet, but not much in the way of extras. So I rode my 10-speed over to Carl’s Jr., filled out an application and, a couple days later, was back

doing an interview, for which I had cut my hair and donned my Sunday slacks, collared shirt and tie — all for a \$3.35 an hour burger-flipping job. I don't remember much of the interview now, but it must have gone well since a few days later I was putting on my Carl's Jr. uniform, which was the first and last time I was ever excited about a job that required wearing a hat and name tag.

And so it began. For more than two years I worked the fryer and grill, I stood at the cash register and parroted the “suggestive sales” lines management had instilled in us — *“Would you like to try our new carrot cake with your order today, sir?”* — I cleaned tables and washed pots, pans, and cooking utensils, I swept the parking lot, I prepped food for the following day's shifts, and I performed the nadir of any and all shifts, the one task that instilled absolute dread among the crew members: cleaning the bathrooms. You never knew what you were going to walk into; but it was all too frequently a potpourri of disaster that left me convinced public restrooms had somehow evolved into an open invitation for humankind to revel in its most grotesque urges.

I had been well prepared for the job long before I was hired at Carl's Jr., as I had been working summer odd jobs for years, and in the fall of 1980 landed a gig cleaning tables at a beer and burger joint at the Los Angeles County Fair on weekends and on school nights. Back then working was as much an adventure as it was a necessity and my job at the fair didn't disappoint, giving me the best seat in the house as I watched hard-luck women mingle with hard-living stable hands and mopped up after the inevitable brawls. But I also cleared nearly \$300 cash during that month-long fair, which was a stunning sum of money for a kid like me back then, as I usually saw Andrew Jackson's portrait on money only once a year, at Christmas, when some aunt or uncle's card would pay off like a lottery ticket.

My take-home pay for two weeks work at Carl's Jr. was anywhere from \$40 to perhaps \$100, depending on how many shifts I worked around my school and sports schedule, but it was money we needed and the experience taught me many lessons, not the least of which was the sense of self-worth and accomplishment that menial labor can bring was short-lived and that the real value of such dead-end jobs was to engender a fear of becoming trapped in one. Any passing ambivalence I may have felt about college vanished every time I had to drain the grease vats or watch my manager — with his red pens secure in his vinyl pocket-protector — carefully inspect the floors I had just scrubbed for any flaw that might require a do-over, or worse (in his mind), a written warning for a sub-standard floor scrubbing.

Even as a teen I could see how the blessing of such short-term jobs might turn into hellish drudgery for many workers if it were to become an employment destination. There's an underlying truth to the reason they call them dead-end jobs. But I also saw that such jobs provided at least a critical transitional income for those on their way up into a profession or skilled-labor career, as well as a last-ditch safety net for those on their way down who had lost other, better employment. Through high school and until the end of my university studies, my job at Carl's Jr. was followed by a six-year succession of gigs that took me from delivering flowers to picking up used goods for a thrift store to busing tables and washing dishes to parking cars. There's more than a little irony now as I recall how casually my peers and I took such work for granted — and for good reason — as such jobs were essentially available on demand. Throughout the 1980s, my friends and I rarely endured a job search that lasted more than a week or two, and they usually ended much sooner as it seemed someone always knew of a boss or business that was hiring.

If the availability of work in Pomona and its surrounding cities was different back then, so too was the complexion of the employment. Despite the recession that had plagued the later years of the 1970s, the Reagan-era arms build-up against the Soviet Union proved to be a boon for the substantial manufacturing base around the Pomona Valley and defense dollars rippled out across the community. Thousands of skilled

labor jobs in the local plants paid living wages that thousands of other jobs around the valley, in retail and service industries, ultimately relied upon. Back then a high school graduate could still work his way into a skilled trade with a reasonable chance of success and a shot at the proverbial American Dream and it was only on a rare occasion that an older career casualty would end up working the grill or mopping the floors with me and my friends.

But you didn't need to be an economist to predict what would happen when the defense spending dried up following the end of the Cold War and the plants that once hummed with round-the-clock shifts began to be shuttered one after the other. The promise of a "peace dividend" in the 1990s that would redirect this manufacturing muscle into some other great national cause ended up bouncing like a bad check Washington wrote to future generations.

The last and perhaps most vicious cycle of the Great Hollowing of American Industry had begun.

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I returned my application to Carl's Jr. a few days later, and attached with it a cover letter, my resume, and a list of references. My cover letter explained that I had worked at the restaurant a generation earlier and was now in desperate need of employment. My application stated that I was willing to work any hours on any day during any shift. My desired salary was whatever they were willing to pay employees. I was willing to take whatever position they might be hiring for; from cook to register clerk or whatever amalgam they used or needed now.

I watched the cashier walk my application into the office where the manager was, where they said a few words to each other before she walked back to the counter. "Ok, thanks," she said with a pleasant smile. "We'll let you know."

They were words I would hear repeatedly over the next few weeks as I made the rounds to the employers of my youth that were still in business. At Marie Calendar's restaurant, where I had bussed tables, washed dishes, and cooked, a manager read over my cover letter and scanned my application and resume in front of me, nodding intently. "I'll give this to my hiring manager and he'll let you know."

About a mile down Route 66 from Marie Calendar's is the Domino's Pizza where I worked as a delivery driver in the late 1980s. They don't give out applications at the store anymore; prospective workers have to download them online — and it is a much more involved process to drive for Domino's these days: requiring the reading and completion of a 16-page application form that includes consent to a background investigation. I slid my application folder under the security glass partition to a clerk who said the manager would get back with me if they were hiring.

It was a slightly more depressing story down at the Disabled American Veterans Thrift Store on Garey Avenue in south Pomona, where I had driven a truck during summers in the mid-1980s. The store still sits in a dilapidated building on the east side of the avenue amid the grim remains of retail shops that probably haven't been viable in decades. It is in the heart of 12th Street territory, Pomona's oldest and largest street gang. There is the El Exito Market and across the street from that is another neighborhood store advertising "wire transfers, phone cards, and bike parts" as well as an income tax service on the second floor — I half expect to see Fred Sanford sitting in a chair out front. A few doors down is a liquor store, which puts three establishments offering off-premise alcohol sales within a block of each other.

The first thing I notice walking into the DAV store is they have moved the checkout stands, which once were lined in a row like a supermarket, into the corner and lines of mothers and their children spill across

the lobby into the clothing racks as they wait to make their purchase. Everyone is speaking Spanish. I am the only Anglo in sight. A black woman who walks past me quickly is the only other non-Latino or immigrant I see in the store.

A large American flag hangs above the front doors on the inside of the store.

I wait my turn and finally make it to the front desk, where I ask one of the checkers for an application. “Sure,” she says politely, disappearing behind an office door. She returns with it. “Are you hiring drivers right now?” I ask. “Or for any position in the store?” She tells me I should speak to a manager when I return the application. Thanking her, I take a moment and walk through the old store that used to hum with the pitch of America’s multiethnic blue-collar workers from Pomona and its working class consumers. I am struck by how much has changed, and not just the disappearance of black, white, and Chicano workers and customers. The store was always second hand — that was its charm and value — but its general manager back then was often fond of declaring “We’re a thrift store, not a junkyard!” That adage seems to have disappeared as I tour the general merchandise section, with shattered and battered goods seemingly tossed onto shelves. Among the items for sale was a bent California license plate, not an antique either, but a modern one that looked as if perhaps someone just found it in the street and brought it into the store. The California plate that was once synonymous with the quintessential good life; now bent, discarded and unable to sell at a thrift store. How apropos.

I couldn’t recall ever seeing a white or black employee working the line, and rarely if ever an English-speaking one. It didn’t take long to find out why.



A few days later I turn in my application package to an office worker, who informs me without looking at it that they aren’t hiring — which is a little strange since they hadn’t mentioned that when I picked up the application only days earlier. I ask her when I might be able to speak with a manager. “Just call back later today, or anytime tomorrow,” she says. When I call back a couple hours later, the woman who answers the phone asks why I want to speak with a manager. I tell her I am following up on an application that I had dropped off earlier in the day. She puts the phone down for a minute, then comes back on the line and tells me that the manager had not received any application. I describe the folder it was in and the woman that I had handed it to. “Nope, it’s not here. Sorry,” she says. “You can come back down and fill out another one if you’d like.”

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The nadir came about a week later, when I stopped by the Pacific Care Car Wash in Upland, a bedroom community not far from Pomona. While I had never worked at the car wash before (I think it was a vacant lot or field when I was in high school and college), I had driven my car through it plenty of times and knew it was a labor-intensive job site, but one in which I couldn’t recall ever seeing a white or black employee working the line, and rarely if ever an English-speaking one. It didn’t take long to find out why. The woman behind the counter at the car wash seemed somewhat stunned that I was asking for an employment application, but recovered long enough to direct me to the adjoining gas station, which was part of the same operation. The clerk there said he couldn’t find any applications, so he phoned the manager and explained the situation. Hanging up, he gave me an awkward look and informed me “My manager said not to give you an application. We’re not hiring.”

Now it was my turn to be stunned. “Well, you may not be hiring right now, but I am sure you will be at some point and I would like to have an application on file for when you do,” I said. But the clerk had his orders.

“Yeah, but my boss said to not give you one. We’re over-staffed today anyway.” *Today?* “Well, I mean just in general,” he said sheepishly, seeming to understand he had given it away.

It’s fairly well accepted by the public, though apparently never admitted to by the employers, that the staff at most car washes around Southern California today are frequently day laborers in the country illegally that are often working for tips alone. There is no application process in play here; just word-of-mouth referrals by amigos already working the line who vouch for who is a good candidate to work at no-cost to the employer and who is not. Of course, it is pure speculation on my part that the dozens of Spanish-speaking men swarming over the cars with towels and squirt bottles may not be American citizens or have legal authorization to work in the United States. It would be absolute conjecture for me to assert that the reason the manager instructed his clerk to *not* give me an application for employment was because when he saw that it was a middle-aged, white, English-speaking dude that was asking for it, he saw trouble. Perhaps he correctly made the assumption that I might be aware of nuances like state and federal labor and wage laws, and have some sense of workplace safety standards, and thus could be a negative influence on the other workers.

But again, I’d just be guessing.

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And so it went. Applications, cover letters, resumes, references, hand-shakes, small talk, the inevitable “We’ll get back to ya!” and then the silence. The phone calls and drop-back-bys to follow up met by either casual indifference or being put off again to a later, evolving date. Or, as in the case of the car wash, I was outright denied even an application to wield a towel.

It’s hard to explain the slow, draining effect this has, but I found myself increasingly facing a myriad of emotions as the slog dragged on: from initial alarm, disbelief, and frustration to a creeping depression and bouts of lethargy to finally a sense of fatalism imbued with a healthy dose of dark humor that’s best summed up in two words: “Screw it.”

Over the course of more than two months my faux job search for the most basic types of employment — the kind that historically American teens have started their work histories with — proved to be an acid-bath that stripped away the notion that these kinds of jobs will always be around and available as a job-of-last-resort for men and women who lose their footing in skilled professions and college-required careers. That is simply no longer the case.

Jobs that I landed within a few days of looking 25 to 30 years ago aren’t even calling back now for an interview. A dozen applications for minimum wage jobs and even more inquiries at other potential entry-level service providers yielded not a single call back. My written and verbal offers to accept *any shift*, to work *any hours*, and in *any capacity* for whatever their starting wage would be didn’t result in even one bite. Nothing.

It got me to thinking what it would be like if I really did need this kind of job in short order? What would it be like if instead of searching for two months without a single offer, I had spent six months looking for any kind of employment and had not received even one call back? What if my search had dragged on for a year? Two years?

How enraged would I have been walking out of the car wash then?

Anne Lennon knows the answer.

The 52-year-old Southern California native was born in Los Angeles and raised between the San Gabriel Valley and the Inland Empire further east. Attractive, well-spoken, single, and with no children, Lennon had established herself in the mortgage field, working for various brokers across the region for nearly 20 years. It was a career that had her earning upwards of \$50,000 annually during good years, a little less at times, but a reliable middle class income nonetheless.

“I worked for firms that ran ‘vanilla paper,’” she said. “These weren’t firms that specialized in sub-prime lending. A lot of it was what we called ‘niche for the rich,’ essentially custom loans for people who could afford it.”

But as niche as some of those loans might have been, the eventual crash of the cocaine-like frenzy that chimerical lending schemes had fueled in the housing market wiped out hundreds of thousands of jobs in the financial and real estate sectors, and Lennon found herself unemployed. Like many of her peers, the true gravity of the situation didn’t immediately register. Believing that as an experienced professional she would have little trouble landing another job as soon as the market stabilized, Lennon said she decided to take a few months to decompress, travel, and see some family on the east coast.

“After that, I got back and started to look for work,” she said. “And it didn’t take long before I began to discover that not only had a lot of the mortgage companies seriously downsized, but many companies were just gone altogether. And they weren’t coming back.”

As her savings dwindled, Lennon said she downshifted from looking for positions that she was overqualified for in the same industry to looking for jobs outside of her career field. “Then it became a matter of just looking for *a job*,” she said. “Whatever I could find.”

Just when it seemed that Lennon was on her last legs, she was hired by a security firm to work in its front office, but the experience proved both alarming and short-lived. “I was interviewing not only the guys that were coming back from Iraq that were looking for jobs, but I was interviewing guys from all walks of life that were coming in looking for work,” she said. “These were people that had owned their own companies, ran their own businesses, and now they were trying to land any kind of work. I was in shock.”

But she was in for another shock.

Lennon was laid off again and after suffering an injury had to turn to state disability to support her while she recovered and then began to look for another job. This second jag of unemployment she describes as a straight shot into the abyss of the recession — a bitter and debilitating lesson of just how overwhelmingly crowded the job market has become.

“I simply could not find work in the Inland Empire [which had been one of the fastest growing regions in the nation during the go-go housing boom], not by using the Internet and not by dropping off resumes, which apparently is not what a lot of employers want anymore. They want to screen people online,” she said. “I was looking everywhere, from chain stores to small mom-and-pop retail shops. From department stores like Macy’s all the way down to very small, family-run boutiques.”

Lennon expanded her job search across four counties — Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Orange — grueling forays through the tangle of traffic-congested freeways of Southern California, in the process running up astronomical fuel bills. Her simultaneous search online didn't prove any more fruitful. "I did Monster.com and CareerBuilders.com," she said. "Those were just black holes. I still get depressed thinking about it."

Lennon said she began to experiment during her job searches; she stopped dressing up and when she did land an interview she would lower what her previous income had actually been. "I decided to lie about what I had been making before because I didn't want to scare them away by having them think I would expect wages higher than they were willing to pay. I was looking for full-time, part-time, temporary positions; you name it. I heard 'We're cutting back right now' so often it became cliché, I could say it with them as they started to say it," she said. "So I was out there, overqualified and selling myself short. I felt desolate, desperate, and depressed. I couldn't believe it was happening to me."

As the weeks turned into months, Lennon was forced into a cycle of downsizing; moving and shedding her possessions, a spiral that appeared might end only when she was living out of her car, or worse.

Lennon said she knew she had a lot of company.

"If there was anything more frightening than what I was going through, it was some of the things I was hearing," she said. "I heard people tell stories about applying for a handful of jobs that a thousand resumes had been taken. Whether it was really a thousand or just a couple hundred, does it matter? I just knew that within a couple years I was now living in another world; one in which I got my [butt] financially kicked and I couldn't recover."

As of this writing, Lennon still has not recovered, at least anything approximating the life that she once knew as a middle class American.

There are so many people just like me, or are about to end up just like me, that the sad truth of it is—this is the new normal.

Thanks to the graciousness of friends, Lennon has a place to stay for now. She also found two part-time jobs — at the Honda Center and Angel Stadium, both of them in Orange County — a significant commute from Riverside County where she has a room. She makes between \$8.45 and \$10 an hour. Her monthly gross is usually around \$750.

"I don't pay rent and I don't buy clothes and I don't have any luxuries," she said. "I buy food and I buy fuel. Pathetic, huh? This is *so not normal* for me, but I am reading and hearing that this is the so-called 'new normal.' And you know what? There are so many people out there just like me, or are about to end up just like me, that the sad truth of it is — this is the new normal."

Lennon seems fairly apolitical, not much of an ideological water-carrier for either side of the aisle or for any side in the raging debate over continued mass immigration into the United States, and particularly illegal immigration. But she admits that her bitter job search has left her wondering what American leaders of all political stripes are thinking as more foreign workers come into the country at a time when so many citizens are out of work and can't find *any* job.

"The way that I am living right now, for a lot of these immigrants that is not only normal for them, but better than where they came from," she said. "I am struggling to handle it and [immigrant workers] are thinking

‘Hey, I live like this, no problem.’ They have adapted to it. Of course the irony is they come to this country looking for a better life and to live like the way we lived, and now more of us are having to live like them.”

Lennon has considered moving, possibly to a Rocky Mountain state or perhaps to Missouri, where she has family and friends. But after a recent trip back there, she returned to California unsure whether such a dramatic move would offer up much better results. Is she willing to leave the two jobs she has — that cover just enough to put food on her stomach and fuel in her tank — for the economic unknown of a distant state?

“I don’t know what I am going to do,” she said. “But I think one thing is certain, the California life that we knew, the life that was made possible by good middle class jobs that offered healthcare and paid a wage where you could save a little money. That’s gone for most people and I don’t think it’s ever coming back.”

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A strange thing frequently happens when considering the depth and scope of unemployment, when trying to determine what the *real* number of out-of-work Americans actually is, and how many more are part of the so-called “underemployed” and financially distressed. Amid the bureaucratic churning of lifeless facts and figures, stories like Lennon’s are easily lost in the shuffle of statistics that roll out of Sacramento and Washington, D.C., and into the newsrooms across the country, where they are crunched and bleached by politicians and punditry that seem increasingly oblivious to the human toll on American citizens.

There is perhaps no greater sign of this cold distance or callous indifference to the plight of the American working class than the reluctance — and in many cases outright refusal — to connect the dots to mass immigration.

It’s surreal to watch *Newsweek’s* Robert J. Samuelson hold forth about the emergence of essentially two economic realities; a relatively bright one for those who are university educated and a grim one for those who are not — without so much as even bothering to mention that the chaotic scramble working-class Americans face for jobs has been greatly impacted by millions of foreign workers in general and illegal immigrants in particular. There is an ideologically acceptable — however intellectually dishonest — separation at work in newsrooms when it comes to immigration, unemployment, and the displacement of American workers. Thus, while it may be reported that as many as two million illegal immigrants now call Los Angeles County home, there will be little if any exploration of just how many jobs the workers of that population occupy — only a blanket assertion that it must be *jobs Americans don’t want and won’t do*.

And just as there is no urgency in Washington (or Sacramento, for that matter) to discern an accurate count of how many illegal immigrants are in the United States today, beyond vague assurances it is around 12 million people (though some credible studies have put the figure at more than double that number), there is likewise no rush to determine how many Americans are really out of the workforce altogether, or how many more find themselves in Lennon’s position of barely surviving by cobbling together part-time, temporary, or sporadic employment. For all the talk about the legions of the unemployed during this Great Recession, and the even millions more “under-employed” workers that have staff jobs but can’t get enough hours, there is another class of American worker that is routinely overlooked but rapidly growing: the *independent contractor*. These are the people that have work — just not a job.

In 2005 the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated there were more than 10 million contractors in the U.S. workforce, a figure that some project will double by 2016. That’s a vast demographic that touches virtually every employment sector in the country. The Labor Department estimates as many as

30 percent of companies misclassify employees as contractors; that's perhaps more than 3.5 million regular workers, according to one federal study. While the hit to Uncle Sam's cash register is considerable — more than \$20 billion lost annually in taxes, according the Government Accounting Office — the price paid by the worker can be even deeper. Beyond the pure financial considerations, companies realize another potent benefit when they classify workers as contractors: absolute leverage.

If China represents all the capitalism without any of the freedom, then full-time contractors represent all the work without any of the protection — kind of like an American citizen version of an illegal immigrant, except they're exploited in their own country.

But you won't hear or read too much discussion of this in news cycles that regurgitate the meaningless figure of a 9.5 percent unemployment rate (meaningless when the actual, total number is quite likely more than double that figure), while giving air time and ink to political leaders that decry the great bleed-out of American jobs to offshore outsourcing while remaining eerily silent about the mass importation of replacement workers — immigrants — by the millions. Thus Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid can keep a straight face while telling a reporter during the campaign last fall that he prevented a vote on a bill that would have required employers receiving stimulus money to use E-Verify to confirm their employees had the legal right to be on the job because immigration reform had to be done in one grand measure, not piecemeal actions. Yet as soon as the election was over, Reid swiftly brought the so-called "Dream Act" to an ill-fated vote that he deemed as a "down payment" on a larger reform bill. So piecemeal amnesty is fine with Reid, but even a modest down payment to protect American workers is not.

Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.) can defiantly proclaim that he has "only one loyalty — and that's to the immigrant community" and not worry about his job.

And Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.) can defiantly proclaim, amidst the greatest economic crisis the American people have faced in nearly a century, that he has "only one loyalty — and that's to the immigrant community" (or more accurately, to Latino immigrants) and not worry about his job — a job in which he swore an oath of allegiance to the American people and their constitution.

Political leaders from both parties can continue to step in front of the cameras to wring their hands in mock nervousness on cue over the staggering job losses

America has suffered and the grim future that tens of millions of her citizens now face, but unless and until they are willing honestly admit that millions of foreign workers pouring into the United States is undeniably devastating to the American worker and are ready to act decisively to end the practice, then they are just playing to themselves.

And Americans, like so many Californians today, will slowly come to understand that while their dream may be over, their long national nightmare has only begun.

Progressives for Immigration Reform is a non-profit organization seeking to educate the public on the unintended consequences of mass migration.

PFIR concurs with the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform that “it is both a right and a responsibility of a democratic society to manage immigration so that it serves the national interest.”

It is the position of PFIR that immigration policy should consider the effects of policy on population size, population growth, skill composition of the labor force, the working conditions and wages of both immigrants and native born workers, domestic water and energy supplies, open space and preservation of biodiversity, and the emission of greenhouse gases from the United States.

PFIR favors policies toward developing countries to lessen the “push” factors of poverty and unemployment that drive emigration.

<http://www.pfirdc.org>